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THE REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE OF TWELVE ON COLLEGE ENTRANCE REQUIREMENTS IN GREEK

IN the discussion of a report like the one indicated in the title, prepared with such laborious care and in such a thoroughly scientific spirit, it is hazardous and possibly presumptuous to indulge in criticism or question. The character and ability of the men who constituted the committee, sufficient in itself to lift it above the plane of petty and amateurish criticism; the unstinted toil expended in gathering, arranging, and interpreting the material accumulated in the process of preparing the report; the endless pains taken in correcting, revising, and testing every assertion formulated and every conclusion reached—all combine to give the report a dignity, a significance and a value which has attended no secondary report since the report of the Committee of Ten. And it may be seriously questioned whether an exception may be made of that.

Commendation, therefore, is almost the only recourse left to one seeking to discuss the report or aiming to give something more than a résumé of the material contained in it. And to be reduced to the barren and profitless task of summarizing what someone else has said is neither complimentary to one's critical faculties, instructive to one's readers nor auspicious for the future of the cause. Finality in anything is to be deplored—most of all in education.

And so, while admitting the very great value of the report, and while voicing the most thoroughgoing appreciation of its almost unvarying merit, it would be cause for regret if all its conclusions were so universally accepted and so irrefutably established that there was nothing more to be said. For myself I do not care to be lulled to dreamless and eternal sleep—like the Lotophagi—"no more to think or work or do," even though it be at the hands of the Committee of Fifteen or the Committee of Twelve!

It is not my purpose in this article to discuss the report of the auxiliary committee on Latin courses in the secondary schools. That report has been already discussed by others. The report of the auxiliary committee on Greek has not, however, been accorded the special consideration which its importance deserves; and that, too, though it is the more vulnerable of the two reports.

The preparation of the Greek program presented to the Committee a comparatively simple problem, first, because the amount of Greek literature suitable to preparatory work is limited, and, second, because the problem had been much simplified by the discussions and report of the Greek Conference of the Committee of Ten, by the commission of the New England colleges, and by the Greek conference held at Columbia in the spring of 1896. The committee was unanimous in reaffirming the position taken by the Committee of Ten, and proposed a program which is in essential agreement with that of the commission of New England colleges and the Columbia conference of 1896.

The committee makes six recommendations:

First, as to time: that three years be devoted to study of Greek in preparatory schools.

Second, as to grammar: that a thorough and methodical study of Greek grammar go on *pari passu* with the reading of literature, so that the pupil may be thoroughly grounded in forms and syntax, and that he be made so familiar with the order of presentation of the various topics in the grammar that he may be easily able to find the information for which he must be constantly seeking.

The third recommendation has reference to the instruction in Greek composition and urges that it be carried on from the beginning, with special attention in the third year. For this the familiar and conceded reasons are given: that it fixes the pupil's vocabulary, that it serves as a constant review of Greek forms, that it quickens his sensitiveness to the peculiar significance of the order of words in the Greek prose sentence and to the fine distinctions of meaning between similar words and constructions, and that it tends to accurate scholarship. The reason why the

committee lays special stress on the study of prose composition during the third year, when Homer is read, is that the pupil may preserve that familiarity with Attic forms and constructions which is essential to satisfactory work in college. The committee strongly recommends the method known as retroversion, that is the re-turning into Greek of the English translation of some Attic prose which has been read by the student. The systematic presentation of Greek constructions in text-books prepared with no reference to a special text is also insisted on. The committee regards a combination of the two methods as desirable—a position which the writer of this article advocated in the *SCHOOL REVIEW* in the issue of June 1894.

In the third recommendation, the committee advocates continued practice in sight-reading, holding that it is not only desirable from the pupil's point of view in gaining a mastery of vocabulary and a confidence in his powers, but is of the utmost importance to the teacher in enabling him to detect the pupil's difficulties and weaknesses.

Reading Greek aloud is the next recommendation of the committee, and insistence is laid on securing the right quantity of the syllables.

Finally, as to what shall be read, the committee realizes that there is nothing more suitable and better adapted for second year reading than Xenophon's *Anabasis*, even though it may not be purest Attic. For the third year the committee recommends that Homer be read, and while admitting that, from one point of view, the study of Attic prose ought to be continued through the entire preparatory course, yet, for the sake of those students who take Greek in the preparatory school only, and do not intend to go to college, and as well also as an inspiration to those who are to continue their studies in college, giving them an enticing foretaste of what is ahead—the committee recommends that Homer be read through the entire third year.

In discussing this report—so complete, so suggestive, so scientifically developed—it seems to me there are only two points on which a difference of opinion can possibly exist. These are, first, the question of the amount of time to be devoted to Greek in

the secondary school, and, second, the question of the reading of Homer. On all other points there can hardly be other than complete unanimity of opinion. With the committee's recommendations regarding grammar, composition, reading aloud, sight-reading and reading material, all teachers of Greek would be in hearty accord. They set forth clearly and conclusively the essential characteristics of the preparatory instruction in Greek. Providing also a three years' course is predicated, I believe the recommendation of the committee as to the reading of Homer is based on sound and convincing grounds and would meet with no serious dissent. The reading of a portion of Homer is eminently desirable provided enough time can be given it to make it of real worth. If it is to be crowded in during the last six or eight weeks of a two years' course, then the advisability of reading it may well be called in question.

The whole discussion therefore sifts down to the one problem of time ; in other words to the recommendation of the committee that three years time be devoted to the study of Greek in the secondary school. In discussing this point I shall aim to look at it largely as a practical problem in school administration from a secondary point of view. I realize full well, how, from the university point of view three years preparation in Greek is eminently desirable and urgently advocated. It is to the interest of the college and university that its matriculates come up with as large and advanced a preparation as possible. From the point of view, too, of the specialist in Greek, the requirement of three years may logically be urged. To him Greek is the *sine qua non* of a finished education, and the more of it that can be had the better.

But besides the view-points of the college and the Greek professor, there must also be taken into consideration by those who have courses of study to construct the large and constantly increasing number of interests which a secondary school has to conserve. A public high school particularly must have due regard not alone to those claims and demands which spring from above, but as well to those who support it and who demand its privileges for every legitimate and properly accredited branch of instruction. In saying this I do not mean to intimate thereby

that the public in general is hostile to Greek. I do not think it is, only I think it feels that Greek should not exact more than its fair share of the time and effort of the school, to the prejudice of the other studies that may have equal value for life. And with the present multiplicity of studies and with the present insistence which each department of thought and scholarship is placing upon the worth and importance of its specialty, the only possible course for the administrator of school programs is that of the conservative and judicial arbiter who serves as a mediator between the people clamoring on the one hand for the practical and utilitarian and the university specialist on the other calling for an ever increasing share of time for his particular interest. Years ago, when the range of secondary studies was comparatively limited, when Latin and Greek constituted, not only the backbone but the very body and substance of the course; when the sciences received only the minutest fraction of the time or attention now devoted to them; when English, as a branch of instruction, was only a child in swaddling clothes compared to its present stage of growth and development; when History had not attained nor even aspired to that dignity and importance which its merits deserved and its value justified; when even Mathematics, that staid and substantial child of the ages, was content with a more modest portion of the educational menu; *then*, I say, it was not so difficult nor so impracticable to give Greek the three years' time which its friends felt that it deserved. But the question of how much time is to be devoted to Greek in the secondary school is not solely nor even primarily an academic question to be solved only in the study of the Greek enthusiast. It is a very practical and everyday question of time, teachers, expense, and a due regard for all the interests which go to make up a thoroughly modern school. Nor is it a question of the educational value of Greek. Admitting all that may be said in behalf of Greek as an instrument of discipline and culture—and as a teacher of Greek I should be the last to call this in question—it still would be true that one might fairly raise the query whether, under existing conditions, the recommendation of three years preparatory Greek is not an error in judgment, and whether it would not have been

much better for the cause of Greek if only two years had been called for. The demand for three years can hardly fail to arouse objections and antagonisms. The demand for two years would have been met with friendliness and favor. With so many subjects pressing upon the pupil's time and attention, competing for his favor, it is hardly fair that more than two years of his preparatory school time be given to Greek. If he desires further acquaintance with it or discovers in himself linguistic capacities, the opportunity for further and more specialized study will be furnished in the university or college.

But the conditions of modern life are so complex that he who has developed one set of reactions at the expense of others finds himself at a disadvantage. He is not prepared to meet life on all sides. The adjustments necessary to the complex and intricate environment in which we find ourselves, are so nice and precise, that it demands the most careful thought to attain the right end and the right results from our educating process. If the biological conception of the nature of education is the sound and accepted one, and if it is the function of education to enable us to react more effectively and accurately upon our environment, then the time-element in the claims of any particular study calls for the most rigid and searching investigation. And the specialist is in some respects the least competent to pass judgment upon it! Just what educational value a study has in the process of mental development; just what amount of time is necessary to give it its full value; just where to draw the line between the extravagant and exuberant claims of friends and the no less exaggerated and unreasoning antagonisms of enemies; these are nice questions of the law and call, not for the partisan, but for the judge. Greek has its distinct and undeniable educational value. It is not necessary to enter upon an argument for its worth or to give expression to the reasons which justify its place in the secondary program. But whether the value and the function of Greek may not be equally subserved, nay even more surely and permanently subserved, by putting forth the very modest and legitimate claim of two years of preparatory study, is a very interesting, and possibly a very

crucial question. For while the claims of Greek to two years time might not be called in question nor antagonized, the claim of three years, by its dangerous proximity to selfishness, might lead to opposition and even a denial of its more moderate and wholly reasonable rights and privileges.

And so from the point of view of a secondary-school program already gorged with a superabundance of studies; from the point of view of a classical curriculum wherein the requirements in Latin and Greek are becoming more and more extensive and exacting; from the point of view of a ripper and more modern conception of education in which science, history, and English are calling for a just recognition of their claims and wherein modern political, social, and religious conditions are recognized as so radically different from those of fifty years ago as to demand a system of education essentially different both in form and content; from the point of view, finally, of the interest and future of Greek itself, I must venture to regret the action of the committee in restricting itself solely to a course of study covering three years. The least that it could have done would have been to outline a course covering two years, as did the Latin Committee in the six-year and the four-year courses. For it certainly is true that a very large number of schools can give only two years to Greek, and for their benefit and guidance a two years' course should have been laid down. It is a little difficult to appreciate the reasons which prevented the committee from preparing such a course, but inasmuch as it was not done, the work of the committee can hardly be looked on as other than incomplete.

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